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PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN
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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2845
INFO RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5211
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2951
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2816
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3455
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1006
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3564
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000641

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: TRADE UNIONS PROMOTE STATE PRIORITIES; FAIL
TO PROTECT WORKERS' RIGHTS

Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Having inherited the Soviet-era trade union structure, the Government of Turkmenistan has made trade unions part of its mechanism for maintaining social and political stability. Independent trade unions do not exist, to the detriment of workers' rights. Besides providing minor social assistance to its members, the role of the trade unions is limited to promoting government policy. END SUMMARY.

UMBRELLA TRADE UNION STRUCTURE

¶2. (SBU) The National Center of Trade Unions of Turkmenistan (National Center) is the umbrella trade union organization in Turkmenistan. The National Center claims a membership of some 1.6 million and is divided along both trade-based and regional lines. There is no legislation on trade unions. While legislation on public organizations does not prohibit the establishment of independent unions, in practice the government does not allow the existence of independent public organizations that are not associated with the State.

TRADE UNIONS PROMOTE STATE AGENDA

¶3. (SBU) Turkmenistan inherited the Soviet system of government-affiliated trade unions. Under former President Niyazov, the state tightened its control over all public organizations under the pretext of "the consolidation of all forces of society for the sake of construction of a democratic and prospering nation." In 1994, the government established the National Revival Movement, an umbrella structure to include the Democratic Party, National Trade Unions, Organization of War Veterans, and Women's and Youth organizations to provide ideological support for the policy of President Niyazov. As such, trade unions function as part of the political system. State policy regarding trade unions makes them part of the mechanism for political stabilization of society. Apart from providing some social assistance to workers, including an annual USD 17 assistance payment and discount coupons to stay at state-owned sanatoriums and children's summer camps, the trade

union's role is limited to promoting government programs.

WORKERS' RIGHTS LACK EFFECTIVE PROTECTION

¶4. (SBU) Although the new labor law, which will come into force on July 1, promotes the role of trade unions in protecting workers' rights, the existing status of trade unions will not allow them to fulfill this function. In practice, in the predominantly state-controlled economy, the close affiliation of both the trade union and the enterprise with the Government seriously limits the workers' ability to bargain effectively. A local NGO activist believes that part of the problem is the absence of civil society, in which the trade union is one of the important elements. This source noted that the development of a trade union's outreach efforts would be an important step to educate workers about the trade union's potential role. To effectively do this, the trade union needs to hire qualified specialists in law, labor protection, and public relations.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Two factors are prerequisites for the trade union to effectively protect workers' interests: development of a civil society and adoption of a law on trade unions that would guarantee the trade union independence from the state. Until these conditions are met in Turkmenistan, trade unions will remain an instrument of the State intended to promote State interests. END COMMENT.

MILES